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United Nations

Report of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children

General Assembly
Official Records
Twenty-seventh Special Session
Supplement No. 2 (A/S-27/2)

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Note

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of capital letters combined with figures. Mention of such a symbol indicates a reference to a United Nations document.

[28 February 2001]

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 54/93 of 7 December 1999, the General Assembly decided to convene in 2001 a special session for follow-up to the World Summit for Children. It also decided to establish an open-ended preparatory committee to prepare for the outcome of the special session. The General Assembly requested the preparatory committee to convene one organizational session on 7 and 8 February 2000 and one substantive session from 30 May to 2 June 2000, and to propose to the Assembly its requirements for further meetings in 2001.

2. In paragraph 15 of its resolution 55/26 of 20 November 2000, the General Assembly decided to convene the special session on children from 19 to 21 September 2001. In paragraph 16 of the same resolution, the Assembly decided to convene two substantive sessions of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session in New York during 2001, one from 29 January to 2 February and the other from 11 to 15 June.

3. The reports of the Preparatory Committee on its organizational session and its first substantive session are contained in documents A/55/43 (Parts I and II).[1]

II. Organizational matters

A. Opening and the duration of the session

4. The Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children held its second session at United Nations Headquarters from 29 January to 2 February 2001. The Committee held 10 meetings (1st to 10th), including two meetings for panel discussions and briefings on child-related conferences and events.

5. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) acted as the substantive secretariat, while the Disarmament and Decolonization Organs Servicing Branch of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services of the United Nations Secretariat served as technical secretariat of the Committee.

6. The session was opened by the Chairperson of the Committee, Patricia Durrant (Jamaica), who made an opening statement. The President of the General Assembly, Harri Holkeri (Finland), made an introductory statement.

7. The Executive Director of UNICEF, Carol Bellamy, also made a statement.

B. Officers

8. The composition of the Bureau of the Committee remained the same as for its organizational and first sessions:

Chairman:

Patricia **Durrant** (Jamaica)

Vice-Chairmen:

Anwarul Karim **Chowdhury** (Bangladesh)
Hanns **Schumacher** (Germany)
Madina Ly **Tall** (Mali)
Lidija **Topic** (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Rapporteur:

At the 3rd meeting of its organizational session, on 7 February 2000, the Preparatory Committee designated Lidija Topic (Bosnia and Herzegovina) Vice-Chairperson with rapporteurial responsibilities.

C. Adoption of the agenda

9. At its 1st meeting, on 29 January, the Committee adopted the provisional agenda (A/AC.256/7), as follows:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Organization of work.
4. Organizational arrangements for the preparatory process and the special session.
5. Consideration of the outcome of the special session.
6. Adoption of the report of the Preparatory Committee on its second session.
7. Other matters.

[1] For the final text, see *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 43* (A/55/43).

D. Documentation

10. The Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on its first session (A/55/43 (Part II));

(b) Provisional agenda and annotations (A/AC.256/7 and Add.1);

(c) Note by the Chairperson of the Committee on the participation of children and adolescents in the special session (A/AC.256/8);

(d) Note by the Chairperson of the Committee on the draft provisional agenda and organizational matters for the special session (A/AC.256/9 and Corr.1 and Add.1);

(e) Information note by the Secretariat on the establishment of the list of speakers for the debate in the plenary of the special session (A/AC.256/10);

(f) Letter dated 22 January 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (A/AC.256/11);

(g) Letter dated 6 October 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (A/AC.256/12);

(h) Draft provisional outcome document, entitled "A world fit for children", submitted by the Bureau of the Committee (A/AC.256/CRP.6);

(i) Provisional programme of work (A/AC.256/CRP.7);

(j) Contributions from United Nations organizations and bodies on their follow-up to the World Summit for Children (A/AC.256/CRP.8);

(k) Draft decision submitted by the Bureau of the Committee, entitled "Arrangements for the participation of entities of the United Nations system in the special session of the General Assembly on children" (A/AC.256/L.9 and Rev.1);

(l) Draft decision submitted by the Bureau of the Committee, entitled "Arrangements for the participation of non-governmental organizations in the special session of the General Assembly on children" (A/AC.256/L.10 and Rev.1);

(m) Draft decisions submitted by the Bureau of the Committee, entitled "Provisional agenda for the special session" and "Organizational arrangements for the special session" (A/AC.256/L.11 and Rev.1).

III. Organizational arrangements for the preparatory process and the special session

11. The Committee considered item 4 of its agenda at its 1st to 5th meetings, on 29, 30 and 31 January. At the 1st meeting, on 29 January, the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, Kul Gautam, made a presentation to the Committee on the update of the reviews and appraisals of preliminary results of the implementation of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action for Implementing the Declaration in the 1990s.

12. Representatives of a number of Member States, United Nations funds and programmes, specialized agencies, and non-governmental organizations made statements. Proposals on the question of the participation of entities of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations, as well as the provisional agenda and organizational arrangements for the special session, were introduced by the Chairperson of the Committee.

13. In accordance with its programme of work (A/AC.256/CRP.7), the Committee held two panel discussions and heard briefings on United Nations, international and regional conferences, and events related to children. Summaries of the panel discussions by the respective Chairpersons are contained in the annexes to the present report.

A. Participation of entities of the United Nations system in the special session

14. At its 9th meeting, on 2 February, the Committee decided that no action would be taken on the draft decision entitled "Arrangements for the participation of entities of the United Nations system in the special session of the General Assembly on children" (A/AC.256/L.9/Rev.1).

B. Participation of non-governmental organizations in the special session

15. At its 9th meeting, on 2 February, the Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session the adoption of a draft decision entitled "Arrangements for the participation of non-governmental organizations in the special session of the General Assembly on children" (A/AC.256/L.10/Rev.1) (see chap. VI, sect. A).

C. Provisional agenda and organizational arrangements for the special session

16. At its 9th meeting, on 2 February, the Committee considered draft decisions entitled "Provisional agenda for the special session" and "Organizational arrangements for the special session" (A/AC.256/L.11/Rev.1, draft decisions I and II). The representative of Algeria proposed an amendment to draft decision II, by which the first sentence of operative paragraph 19, which read:

> "Entities of the United Nations system, including programmes, funds, specialized agencies and regional commissions, with specific expertise in the subject matter of the special session, may make statements in the debate in plenary, provided that they are represented at the highest level"

would be revised to read:

> "Heads of entities of the United Nations system, including programmes, funds, specialized agencies and regional commissions, with specific expertise in the subject matter of the special session, may make statements in the debate in plenary".

17. At the same meeting, the Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh special session the adoption of draft decision I and draft decision II, as orally amended (see chap. VI, sect. B, draft decisions I and II).

18. Also at its 9th meeting, the Committee considered the notes by the Chairperson on the participation of children and adolescents in the special session (A/AC.256/8) and its preparatory process and on additional organizational arrangements for the special session (A/AC.256/9/Add.1). The Committee decided that action on these matters would be taken at a later stage.

IV. Consideration of the outcome of the special session

19. The Committee considered item 5 of its agenda at its 5th to 8th meetings, on 31 January and 1 February. Representatives of many Member States and United Nations funds and programmes, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations made statements, comments and suggestions on the draft provisional outcome document (A/AC.256/CRP.6).

20. At its 9th meeting, on 2 February, the Committee agreed to authorize its Bureau, with the support of the substantive secretariat, to prepare a revised version of the draft outcome document, taking into account the views expressed during its second session, for consideration at the third session.

V. Adoption of the report of the Committee on its second session

21. At the 9th meeting, on 2 February, Lidija Topic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), as Vice-Chairperson with rapporteurial responsibilities, introduced the draft report of the Preparatory Committee on its second session (A/AC.256/L.12).

22. At the same meeting, the Committee took note of the summaries by the Chairpersons of the two panels convened at its second session (see annexes I and II).

23. Also at the same meeting, the Committee adopted the draft report on its second session (A/AC.256/L.12), as orally amended.

VI. Recommendations of the Committee

A. Draft decision for adoption by the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth regular session*

24. The Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children recommends to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session the adoption of the following draft decision:

Arrangements for the participation of non-governmental organizations in the special session of the General Assembly on children

The General Assembly decides that:

(a) Representatives of non-governmental organizations accredited to the special session** may make statements in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the special session;

(b) Given availability of time, a limited number of representatives of non-governmental organizations accredited to the special session** may also make statements in the debate in the plenary of the special session;

(c) The President of the General Assembly is requested to present the list of selected non-governmental organizations to the Member States in a timely manner for approval. The President of the General Assembly is also requested to ensure that such selection is made on an equal and transparent basis, taking into account the geographical representation and diversity of non-governmental organizations;

(d) These arrangements shall in no way create a precedent for other special sessions of the General Assembly.

B. Draft decisions for adoption by the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh special session

25. The Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children recommends to the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh special session the adoption of the following draft decisions:

Draft decision I
Provisional agenda for the special session

The General Assembly adopts the following provisional agenda for its twenty-seventh special session:

1. Opening of the session by the Chairman of the delegation of the President of the fifty-sixth regular session of the General Assembly.
2. Minute of silent prayer or meditation.
3. Credentials of representatives to the special session of the General Assembly:
   (a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee;
   (b) Report of the Credentials Committee.
4. Election of the President.
5. Report of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children.
6. Organization of the session.
7. Adoption of the agenda.
8. Review of the achievements in the implementation and results of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s.

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* Adopted by the General Assembly at its 91st plenary meeting, on 14 February 2001 (see Assembly decision 55/459).

** Non-governmental organizations accredited to the special session in accordance with the relevant decisions of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children either enjoy consultative status in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996 or are accredited to UNICEF or have a collaborative relationship and partnership with UNICEF.

9. Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade.

10. Adoption of the final document.

Draft decision II
Organizational arrangements for the special session

The General Assembly adopts the following organizational arrangements for its twenty-seventh special session:

Date and duration

1. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 55/26 of 20 November 2000, the special session shall be held from 19 to 21 September 2001.

Title of the special session

2. On the basis of General Assembly resolution 55/26, the title of the special session shall be "Special session of the General Assembly on children".

President

3. The special session shall be held under the presidency of the President of the fifty-sixth regular session of the General Assembly.

Vice-Presidents

4. The Vice-Presidents of the special session shall be the same as those of the fifty-sixth regular session of the General Assembly.

Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole

5. The General Assembly shall establish an Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-seventh Special Session.

6. The Bureau of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole shall consist of one Chairperson and four Vice-Chairpersons, one of whom will serve as Rapporteur. The Bureau of the Preparatory Committee will serve as the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

Credentials Committee

7. The Credentials Committee of the special session shall have the same membership as the Credentials Committee of the fifty-sixth regular session of the General Assembly.

General Committee

8. The General Committee shall consist of the President and the 21 Vice-Presidents of the special session, the Chairpersons of the six Main Committees of the fifty-sixth regular session of the General Assembly and the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

Rules of procedure

9. The rules of procedure of the General Assembly shall apply to the special session.

Allocation of items

10. All items of the provisional agenda shall be considered directly in the plenary of the special session; the substantive items shall also be allocated to the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

Level of representation

11. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/93 of 7 December 1999, participation shall be at the highest possible level.

Schedule of plenary meetings

12. Six plenary meetings will be held, as follows:

Wednesday, 19 September

9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
3 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Thursday, 20 September

9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
3 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Friday, 21 September

9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
3 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Debate in plenary

13. Statements in the debate in the plenary of the special session shall be limited to five minutes.

14. The list of speakers for the debate in the plenary will be established by a drawing of lots.

15. Member States, the Holy See and Switzerland, in their capacity as observer States, and Palestine, in its capacity as observer, will be invited to participate in the drawing of lots.

16. The order of precedence for the list of speakers will be as follows: (a) heads of State/heads of Government; (b) Vice-Presidents/Crown Princes or Princesses; (c) the highest-ranking official of the Holy See and Switzerland, in their capacity as observer States, and of Palestine, in its capacity as observer; (d) Deputy Prime Ministers; (e) Ministers; (f) Vice-Ministers; and (g) Chairmen of Delegations.

Participation of Member States

17. In its resolution 55/26, the General Assembly reaffirmed the need for the full and effective participation of Member States in the special session. In its resolutions 54/93 and 55/26, the Assembly invited the participation of heads of State and Government in the special session.

Participation of speakers other than Member States

18. With respect to the participation of observers in the debate in plenary:

(a) A number of organizations and entities have received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly;

(b) In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 54/93 and 55/26, States members of the specialized agencies that are not members of the United Nations may participate in the special session as observers;

(c) In accordance with General Assembly resolution 55/26, the following associate members of the regional commissions may participate in the special session as observers, subject to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly: American Samoa, Anguilla, Aruba, British Virgin Islands, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, Montserrat, Netherlands Antilles, New Caledonia, Niue, Puerto Rico and United States Virgin Islands.

19. Heads of entities of the United Nations system, including programmes, funds, specialized agencies and regional commissions, with specific expertise in the subject matter of the special session, may make statements in the debate in plenary. Representatives of the United Nations system may also make statements in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

20. Representatives of non-governmental organizations accredited to the special session* may make statements in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the special session. Given availability of time, a limited number of representatives of non-governmental organizations accredited to the special session may also make statements in the debate in the plenary of the special session. The President of the General Assembly is requested to present the list of selected non-governmental organizations to the Member States in a timely manner for approval. The President of the General Assembly is also requested to ensure that such selection is made on an equal and transparent basis, taking into account the geographical representation and diversity of non-governmental organizations.

21. The last two speaking slots at each plenary meeting, with the exception of the first and last plenary meetings, may be reserved for participants other than Member States, the Holy See, Switzerland and Palestine provided that they are represented at the highest level.

22. The arrangements outlined in paragraphs 19 to 21 above shall in no way create a precedent for other special sessions of the General Assembly.

* Non-governmental organizations accredited to the special session in accordance with the relevant decisions of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children either enjoy consultative status in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996 or are accredited to UNICEF or have a collaborative relationship and partnership with UNICEF.

Annex I

Summary of the panel presentations and discussion on adolescent development and participation

1. On 31 January 2001 the Preparatory Committee held a panel discussion on adolescent development and participation. Adolescents (10-19 years) are currently the largest generation of this segment of the population in history, numbering about 1 billion, or one in six people in the planet. Adolescence entails new developmental tasks, capabilities, opportunities, social roles and responsibilities, and societal expectations that together represent a transition out of childhood. These new developments reflect biological changes, social and cultural expectations and personal self-definitions.

2. Adolescents are confronted with a range of new challenges such as having to deal with sexuality, including early marriage, early childbearing and parenting; with livelihoods and economic activity, and the impact of work on social status and personal identity; managing to sustain education and enhance knowledge and skills; maintaining personal health and confronting the new morbidities, such as HIV/AIDS, drugs, alcohol and tobacco, suicide and unintentional injuries; learning to cope with violence, from organized gangs to armed conflicts; and assuming civic responsibilities, from involvement in voluntary organizations to voting.

3. All of these are issues that emerge for adolescents and are not characteristic of children during the early years of life. It is therefore essential to see adolescents as different from children during their first decade, and to reflect this fact in the outcome document. It was suggested by one presenter that the title of the outcome document should be "A World Fit for Children and Young People".

4. The period of adolescence is critical for shaping the entire course for the rest of the life-span. It is a time to build human capital, establishing a coherent sense of who one is in relation to others, to deepen pro-social values and attitudes, to form civic commitments, to become aware of sexuality and fertility, and to learn how to deal with health- and life-compromising choices and decisions involving such things as tobacco, drugs, weapons, and school-leaving.

5. Research about adolescents in developing and developed countries has reshaped our thinking about what needs to be done with and for adolescents. Many myths need to be abandoned. It is a myth that adolescence is pre-determined by what happens in childhood — in reality there is great capacity to benefit from second chances. It is a myth that adolescence is a time of problems or pathology — in reality it is a time of positive development, of gaining new skills and competencies, when promotive and protective interventions in the context of adolescents' lives can insulate them from exposure to risk. It is a myth that adolescence is simply a time of unfolding of innate tendencies — in reality young people's development is constantly being shaped by their social context. It is a myth that adolescents are passive and easily manipulated — in reality adolescents are capable of shaping the course of their own lives and are able to contribute to their societies in positive and constructive ways.

6. Recent research has a number of implications for social policy and action. There is a need to develop programmes and strategies uniquely focused on this age group, rather than subsuming them under programmes for children. There is a need to provide a structure of opportunity, for education, health care and livelihoods, among others, and to provide second chances when needed. There is a need to change the legal and social norms which constrain and limit positive adolescent development and participation. There is a need to stop seeing adolescents as problems and to start seeing them as a valuable resource, and as active citizens with rights.

7. Concerning young people's involvement in political processes and civil society, one option to be considered is to extend their voting rights. There is a need for more effective participation channels for young people, through, for example, child and youth parliaments, membership in political organizations, and participation in schools, in order to ensure engagement for young people, with young people and also from young people.

8. Some countries are already exploring ways of increasing the participation of young people in elections; arguments against extending voting rights to

adolescents frequently do not withstand critical evaluation. If we want to give more visibility to young people and ensure that they are able to contribute to decisions that have an impact on their lives, one presenter suggested, consideration should be given to including a call in the outcome document for the entitlement of adolescents to vote.

9. One group of countries where there are a number of specific challenges is those countries that are in economic and political transition. In such countries there may not be a culture of encouraging adolescents to participate in a meaningful way, and in such situations it will be necessary to find processes and develop concrete examples of moving from manipulation and decoration to real participation.

10. In Ukraine there are a number of successful experiences of young people becoming volunteers, providing social support to vulnerable young people. There is also a youth for health network that is recognized throughout the Ukraine, that works not only for young people but also with young people. The youth-friendly cities movement has contributed to creating important opportunities for young people and adults.

11. These and other activities can help to make children visible in the process of policy development and incorporate respect for children's views in all matters concerning them, including juridical and administrative proceedings, and to bring together young people with a broad range of civil society groups to ensure that the rights of children and adolescents are at the forefront of the national agenda. If the outcome document is to mobilize such activities and strengthen national and global commitments to adolescents' rights, it will be important to include a focus on effective mechanisms of civil society monitoring of government commitments.

12. One of the challenges for Governments is to develop processes and spaces where young people can discuss the issues that confront them and explore solutions. In Jordan, a number of youth forums have been organized since 1999 to provide an opportunity for a wide range of stakeholders to discuss priority problems affecting young people and explore solutions. Building on these national experiences, a regional youth forum provided young people with an opportunity to share their views and experiences, to transcend cultural barriers and define themselves by what they shared in common. During that regional forum a number of action plans were developed by the young people that focused on issues of common concern.

13. In conflicts, children, adolescents and women have become the primary victims. In Sierra Leone, conflicts over the past two decades have destroyed over 50 per cent of the education infrastructure. The privatization of violence, the displacement of populations and debilitating poverty, including crippling rates of debt in addition to the impact of the conflict, have created uncertainty and lack of hope in the lives of adolescents, and made them vulnerable to exploitation by and dependency on adults.

14. Fortunately, despite the difficulties, a growing number of programmes use a range of community, non-governmental organization and government partnerships to increase adolescents' access to education, including second chance education. There has also been a focus on other key programmes that contribute to adolescents' development in such situations, including health, peace-building and reconciliation. If adolescents are to be transformed from liabilities into assets in such situations, there is also a need for programmes that focus on sustainable livelihoods.

15. In addition to developing their capacities and values, and increasing their access to services and opportunities, it is necessary to help create safe and supportive environments for adolescents, and ensure their participation in decisions that affect their lives. Participation is not only an end but also a means to build skills and contribute to their communities during reconstruction. Although the potential of adolescents remains untapped in conflict situations, they clearly have a great deal of resilience and can be a positive force in the peace process, particularly at the local level, and in building a culture of non-violence.

16. The impact of conflict is often compounded by the impact of HIV/AIDS, which is fuelled by the conflict but is not given adequate attention despite the enormous threat that it poses to national development and to adolescents' development. Adolescents are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, particularly adolescent girls, many of whom have been raped or forced into sexual slavery, and yet their access to information, life skills and services, and protection from abuse is seriously limited. The outcome document therefore needs to

include a strong focus on HIV/AIDS and young people and adolescents in conflict situations. It also needs to include a focus on other disadvantaged adolescents.

17. There are many groups of adolescents who are particularly vulnerable, and the presentation of Morocco outlined the challenges for Governments and civil society of reaching young people who are not living with their families, such as "street children", who often have no concept of authority, suffer from loss of self-confidence, rejection of institutions, high levels of violence, strong dependency on substances such as glue, and have little investment in the future. They often have serious health problems, for example respiratory and skin infections, sexually transmitted infections, stunted growth and development. However, they also have effective survival skills, a strong sense of solidarity, and the courage to survive on the streets. They demonstrate great resilience, imagination and creativity.

18. Bridges need to be built to such groups in order to fulfil and protect their rights, and this will necessitate listening carefully to them, building their confidence, strengthening their capacities, seeing them as actors not as victims, and increasing their access to appropriate and relevant education, to health services, and to sports and other forms of recreation. It is also important to fight against the negative images of such children, and to strengthen partnerships to meet their rights to development, including their citizenship rights.

19. Such disadvantaged and vulnerable adolescents force policy makers to give particular attention to the family, both as a causative factor, for example where there is domestic violence, and in terms of the constraints and opportunities for reintegration. The young people who will not return to their families need shelters, not ghettos, which involve young people and provide them with the skills, opportunities and support required for their development, taking their special needs into consideration. Educators, service providers, police, media and young people themselves need to be involved.

20. The panel presentations demonstrated that there is remarkable commonality and consensus about the situation of adolescents around the world, despite the differences in individual characteristics and a wide range of cultural and socio-economic circumstances. There is a shared appreciation of the nature of adolescence, of the resource that adolescents represent and the many possibilities for families and societies to benefit from the contributions they can make. The outcome document needs to provide an optimistic and positive vision about what can be done with and for young people in the future.

21. In all of the presentations there was a strong and consistent emphasis on adolescent participation, and it was clear that there is a growing appreciation that adolescents' participation makes an important contribution to their positive development. There was also a strong consensus that, despite the problems confronting many adolescents around the world, societies need to recognize that children are an investment, and that this may entail giving adolescents second and third chances — education being but one example of this.

22. It will also be important not to be constrained by traditions and cultures that are at times antithetical to young people. While it is important to identify and strengthen cultural practices that support adolescent development, it is not sufficient to base policies and programmes on past experience — globalization and the new information technologies have demonstrated that boundaries can be broken, constraints can be overcome.

23. Children's movements are an important example of adolescent participation and need to be supported, particularly those movements that involve vulnerable and disadvantaged adolescents.

24. A focus on the family is very important, and it will be an ongoing challenge to identify effective ways to support parents and other care-givers in fulfilling and protecting adolescents' rights to development and participation. Adolescents must first have opportunities to participate and be supported in their homes, and adolescents themselves recognize the important role that their parents play in their lives. At the same time, it needs to be recognized that traditional concepts of family are changing, and that a growing number of adolescents, for a variety of reasons, are growing up without their biological parents. This needs to be taken into consideration in the development of policies and programmes, which have to support all kinds of families.

25. Schools also provide another important setting for participation, for providing adolescents with guidance and support, and for meeting their rights to development, including access to quality and relevant

education. In addition to the important guidance that is provided by parents, teachers and other service providers, adolescents need the space to experiment by themselves, and to learn from their peers; striking the correct balance is an important consideration in the development and implementation of policies and programmes. Similarly, while adolescents need information, it is important that this is accompanied by skills and values.

26. Although children's first chances are of paramount importance for their development, many children reach adolescence without having had the opportunities to develop their capacities, and it is important to ensure that they have access to second chances — not to treat them as lost but to have a redemptive approach to policies and programmes that focus on their development.

Annex II

Summary of the panel presentations and discussion on the girl child

1. On 30 January 2001, the Preparatory Committee held a panel discussion on the girl child. Six panellists addressed the Committee and several delegations and one representative of a non-governmental organization made additional comments. The session explored the current situation of girls in the world, the obvious and underlying constraints that lead to their systemic disadvantage, and lessons learned about what needs to be done to ensure that the rights of all girls are fulfilled.

2. The introduction to the panel made clear the overriding importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in responding to the needs of girls. The Convention clearly focuses the attention of the world not only on young girls but also on girls to the age of 18. It clearly lays out guiding principles — survival and development, non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, protection and participation — and mandates specific actions in relation to particular rights in areas such as health and education. It has led the Committee on the Rights of the Child to be active and forceful in showing its concern for discriminatory practices against girls revealed in country reports and its support of measures taken by Governments to address and redress such discrimination, for example, raising and equalizing the age of consent, marriage and criminal liability for both boys and girls.

The situation of girls

3. Despite international attention and commitments made at the world conferences of the 1990s and the presence of positive trends — economic, political and social — in some parts of the world over the last decade, the situation of girls is not improving. Girls continue to be at a disadvantage in all societies. They are the most vulnerable, the most discriminated against, the last to see the benefits of development. In many parts of the world, in fact, discrimination against girls has increased. This is evident in terms of:

(a) Increasing gender gaps in access to health, nutrition and education services, the last leading to lower rates of school attendance and literacy;

(b) More frequent prenatal sex selection and female infanticide;

(c) Rising rates of infant and maternal mortality — the former due, for example, to discriminatory feeding practices and lower rates of vaccination and access to curative health care;

(d) Increased numbers of girls subject to trafficking, prostitution and other hazardous forms of labour, sexual abuse and exploitation, communal and domestic violence, early pregnancy and abortions, drug and tobacco use, and HIV infection (at ever younger ages);

(e) Continuing harmful traditional practices of female genital mutilation, honour killings and dowry;

(f) The denial of protection rights through early and forced marriage, low birth registration rates, and a lack of information on sexual and reproductive health.

4. Some girls face greater discrimination than others — by birth order and by the compounding of gender with discrimination related to socio-economic class, location, ethnicity and disability.

Constraints to the fulfilment of the rights of girls

5. Increases in poverty, debt and instability are major factors which both lead to the denial of girls' rights and reinforce inter-generational cycles of poverty and discrimination. The panellists also discussed many other, often less obvious constraints, to the realization of these rights, for example:

(a) Girls — and their situation — are often invisible. Their needs and problems remain generally under-researched, and there is a starting lack of statistics on the situation of girls; with the partial exception of education, statistics are rarely disaggregated by gender, especially in health.

(b) Families allocate their resources inequitably, to the disadvantage of girls. Discrimination therefore relates as much to family choice as to the availability of services. Inter-generational resource flows work against daughters; although daughters often support families — and feel a strong obligation to do so — they are also considered a liability to the family. Families end up depending on daughters and not

investing in their development. Analysing girls as "daughters" is therefore essential.

(c) Children are naturally "gendered" in families and communities. By gender alone, girls are disadvantaged; everyday socialization, often based on systems of patriarchy, leads to a lower value placed on girls and their contributions and this is internalized by the girls. Girls and boys are given different roles, to the disadvantage of girls; boys are given second chances to education when girls are not, and girls end up believing these stereotypes of disadvantage despite the reality that they often carry the largest share of family support. Discrimination and inequality therefore continue from one generation to another.

(d) While children are gendered, policies and programmes often are not. Even if they are concerned with mothers and children, they often do not focus specifically on girls or take into account the everyday beliefs and behaviours that discriminate against girls and assign a lesser value to girls.

Lessons learned and recommendations for action

6. The panel discussed the many important lessons that have been learned over the last decade and earlier about what can be done to ensure that the rights of girls are fulfilled, and made the following recommendations for action:

(a) **Increase the visibility of the disadvantages and vulnerabilities faced by girls and their families**. This requires the disaggregation of data in all fields and at all levels leading to clear profiles of the situation of girls around the world. Where there is more data and analysis, there can be more action. Such data should provide information about the risks girls face at different ages and in different settings and focus on the health and education status of girls and women. Research on school drop-outs in Thailand, for example, revealed the large impact of migration on girls' education and led to a multi-pronged strategy to ensure that they remained in school.

(b) **Identify, document, publicize and validate practical, innovative girl-specific projects, policies and programmes** — especially those which address wider dimensions and root causes of gender inequality — for example, through a focus on the role of boys and men and changes in social norms and cultural values of both males and females.

(c) **Promote more sustained girl-specific strategies by, and alliances among, agencies, national Governments, and non-governmental organizations**. Without these, programmes will remain ad hoc, random and under-resourced, and girls will remain at risk.

(d) **Strengthen systems for monitoring progress**. Benchmarks to measure progress must be established and the accountabilities of government and civil society defined.

(e) **Empower and utilize the human resources that exist** — especially of girls and women in working in their own communities and making decisions about their own development.

(f) **Let girls participate in the determination of their own future**. Whether in schools, communities or youth organizations and parliaments, girls must be encouraged to speak and take part.

(g) **Ensure that girls receive an education of good quality, in girl-friendly environments** — as a right and including education about their rights, and to gain the knowledge and skills needed to protect themselves from violence, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, sexual abuse and exploitation. This will enable them to take part in and contribute to political, economic and social life equally with boys. In such education, schools must be more active in looking for and including girls in classroom and learning, and girls — like boys — must always be given another chance to succeed.

(h) **Promote a "culture of rights"** where the indifferent are activated, where all legal and social institutions and mechanisms are protective of and sensitive to the needs of girls, where all men and women work together — urgently — to demand and achieve gender equality.

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